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RESEARCH NOTE

The 'Dinner Date' concept: Reconciling the dating and hospitality industries

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Abstract:

Purpose: This research note argues that investigating the intersections between hospitality and speed dating events can yield practical implications for both industries. Hospitality professionals can gain valuable insights into how to enhance customer experiences by understanding the unique needs and expectations of individuals participating in dating events. Conversely, dating event organizers can draw upon the principles of hospitality to create more engaging and enjoyable experiences for their attendees, ultimately contributing to the success and longevity of such events.

Methods: Adopting the User-Centred Design (UCD), which is structured around seven distinct phases including understand, observe, engage, define, ideate, prototype and test, and implement.

Results: This study suggests a blueprint for the new concept of speed dating event. It proposes a methodology to develop a research agenda to generate strategies for implementing the "dinner date" concept.

Implications: Developing aligning goals between hospitality and dating industries creates a valuable experience for their target audience, where food is presented as a soft management tool facilitating this relationship.

Keywords: food and beverage, UCD framework, conviviality, customer experience, research agenda, soft management tool

JEL Classification: L83, G14, L80

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1 INTRODUCTION

Scholarship of the hospitality and dating industries has gradually developed into two separate streams of research. Indeed, no existing research has investigated the intersection between both industries (Séraphin, 2023) creating a gap in knowledge pertaining to the intricate relationship between these industries. By examining the symbiotic connection between hospitality and speed dating events, this study aims to bridge this gap and shed light on the unexplored intersections that exist. Merging the realms of hospitality and dating can lead to a rich world of interplay between these industries ensuring an overall positive experience of speed dating events and for the associated players.

Reconciliation is defined as the process of flattening hurdles amongst entities to facilitate interactions (Wang, Jha, Livny & McDaniel, 2004). Reconciliation can contribute to commercial success, financial performance, and sustainable growth (Ngo, Hales Lohmann, 2019; O'Cass and Sok, 2015), but this is only possible when an intersection exists between these entities (Prince, 2017; Wang et al, 2004). In hospitality research, intersection has been explored in discussions of customer service, often to explain the intersections between what the customers expect and perceive, and what organisations consider and provide (Islam and Kirillova, 2020; O'Cass and Sok, 2015). In this study, intersection is explored in terms of how the dating and the hospitality industries can work more effectively as Séraphin and Yallop (2023) pointed out that there is a deficit of trust

and commitment between both industries, which is translated into a lack of marketing partnership. Indeed, the speed dating event organisers are systematically promoting bars and restaurants where they are hosting their event, as venues are part of their unique selling points. However, bars and restaurants are very rarely promoting the fact that they are hosting speed dating events.

Because gastronomy related events play a significant role in the emotional engagement of stakeholders involved (Folgado-Fernandez, Duarte and Hernandez-Mogollon, 2021), this study is arguing that speed dating gastronomy themed events could play a significant role in developing trust and commitment between both industries, and lead to commercial success, which is the purpose of joint ventures (O'Cass and Sok, 2015; Okumus, Altinay, Chathoth and Koseoglu, 2020). Additionally, because 'trust and control are interlinked processes commonly seen as key to reach effectiveness in inter-and intraorganizational relations' (Costa and Bijlsma-Frankema, 2007: 392), this study argues that organisers of speed dating events (dating industry) could control the hospitality industry through the quality of the food provided at events. As for the venues (hospitality industry), it could control the dating industry through feedback of speed daters in terms of quality of experience, and the number of speed daters coming back to the restaurant just for food and drink.

The research question of this research note is as follows:

What concept of speed dating events themed around food could contribute to reconcile the dating industry and the hospitality industry?

This study is contributing to further knowledge in customer experience and co-creation atmosphere; development of convivial tools; bodies, space, politics, and their interrelations; and convivial atmosphere in hospitality and events. For Rokka, Auriacombe, Arnould and Sitz (2023) further research are needed in these areas to improve touristic experience, and more specifically encounters and effective engagement between tourists and workers on the tourism industry.

2 DATING EVENTS AND THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

The dating industry offers products and services in the digital space with online dating apps or websites, and in the physical space with traditional dating agencies and through events, which are the focus of this research (Alexopoulos, Timmermans and McNallie, 2020). The dating industry is at the 'phygital' intersection of physical and digital spaces and experiences. Phygitalisation has been identified as having the potential to contribute to customer experience and engagement (Baratta, Bonfanti, Cucci and Simeoni, 2022; Mele and Russo-Spena, 2021), and to creating new opportunities for businesses to grow (Ballina, Valdes and Del Valle, 2019; Mele and Russo-Spena, 2021). In that sense, there is a noteworthy willingness of service providers to embrace digitalisation and successful incorporation of facilitative technology (Thees, Störmann, Thiele, and Olbrich, 2021).

Dating events are very popular events with a wide range of customers, as this type of event can be designed to be inclusive in terms of social background, gender, religion, ethnicity and other aspects (Finkel et al, 2007; Korobov, 2011). The purpose of these events is to facilitate encounters between individuals who are looking for romantic partners (Finkel et al, 2007; Korobov, 2011). To facilitate exchange amongst participants, the events are often based around themes and activities such as drunk Jenga; squid game; video game, lock key, naked parties, etc. (Séraphin, 2023; Séraphin and Yallop, 2023). From an economic point of view, the industry was worth \$7.49 billion in 2021. It is expected to be worth \$8.67 billion in 2027 (BusinessofApps [Online]). The dating industry also contributes to the economic performance of the hospitality industry. Its contribution is worth billions to the UK hospitality industry (Ruddick, 2012; Séraphin, 2023; Séraphin and Yallop, 2023).

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1. User-centred design (UCD) framework

UCD is a participative methodology (as in engaging users) that assists with the design of new products and/or services, hence the reason it is considered as a customer centred approach (Font, English and Gkritzali, 2018). The approach is articulated around seven phases, namely: understand, observe, engage, define, ideate, prototype and test, and implement (Font et al, 2018).

- Phase 1 (P1) is about 'understanding' the use that is going to be made of the product or service designed. This phase presents sometimes some challenges such as working with third parties.
- Phase 2 (P2) or 'Observe' is all about observing participants in their normal environment in order to have a better understanding of who they are, how they feel, how they interact with their environment and other individuals, etc about a particular topic, situation, etc.
- Phase 3 (P3) which is referred as 'Engage' refers to how the stakeholders involved are engaging (observation, interview, etc) with each other.
- Phase 4 (P4) which is the 'Define' stage, enables the designer of the product or service to cluster the results of his observation, interview, etc and to interpret them.
- Phase 5 (P5) or 'Ideate' is all about the generation of ideas.
- Phase 6 (P6), 'Prototype and test' is the phase where the researcher/designer create a prototype to be tested in order to gather feedback to gauge the viability and wish for the product/service.
- Phase 7 (P7) 'Implement' is the phase where the prototype is operationalised, and performance monitored.

3.2. Application of the User-centred design (UCD) framework

Phase 1 to 4 has been covered in the introduction. Indeed, this section has pointed out that commitment and trust are what is missing for both industries (hospitality and dating) to work

harmoniously (Strategic Alliance). The introduction has also established the fact that for both industries to reconcile around speed dating events food and beverage centred theme events would help as it is the intrinsic cue of the hospitality industry, and a major factor of appeal for customers. In the same line of thought, venues and their assets are one of the major factors put forward by speed dating organisers to attract speed daters.

Table 1. Application of the User-centred design (UCD) framework

UCD Framework	Comments	Sources
Understanding	Gastronomy related events play a significant role in the emotional engagement of stakeholders	Folgado-Fernandez et al. (2021)
	Gastronomy can contribute to develop trust and commitment between both dating and hospitality industries, alongside leading to commercial success.	O’Cass & Sok (2015); Okumus et al (2020)
Observe	Dating events are very popular events with a wide range of customers, as this type of event is inclusive.	Finkel & Eastwick (2008); Korobov (2011)
Engage & define	Dating events are based on themes and activities such as drunk Jenga; squid game; video game, lock key, naked parties, etc.	S�raphin (2023); S�raphin & Yallop (2023)

Source: The authors

4 RESULTS

For the phase ‘Ideate’ the paper is going to suggest a theme for speed dating events and provide an associated rationale. As for phase 6 and 7, they will be used to develop a research agenda.

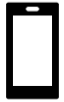





4.1. Dinner dates: ‘ideate’

Based on the programme ‘Dinner Date’ on Netflix, this study is providing a new concept of speed dating event (‘3 Course meal and 3 Dates’). Indeed, for this new concept, speed daters would register on an app. On top of already existing details requested by the speed dating event organisers, speed daters will have to order their three-course meal (starter, main and desert). Then, speed daters will choose based on the menu who they want to chat with during the event. Each speed dater will be able to chat with three participants (one participant during the starter meal, dinner meal, and third participant during the main meal). From a logistic point of view, at the end of each course, men would move to the table of their selected dates. Then, at the end of the event, they choose their favourite date, and if there is a match, participants will be able to exchange details (as it is already the case). This concept adopts an emotional approach to reasoning and decision-making. It integrates preferences, perceptions, and expectations as fundamentals to the decision-making process (Halkiopoulos, Antonopoulou, Papadopoulos, Giannoukou, and Gkintoni, 2020). The blueprint of the new concept is summarised in table 2.

This new concept is based on advertainment, which combines advertisement and entertainment; and edutainment, which combines education and entertainment (Tagg and Wang, 2016). Combined, advertainment and edutainment, used by organisations such as KidZania, etc are considered as

powerful and innovative marketing approach (Castorena and Prado, 2013; Lonsway, 2016). The success of this marketing approach is also based on the fact it is a win-win between the service/product provider who gets an opportunity to showcase what it has to offer; and the consumer, because they have an enjoyable time (Lonsway, 2016).

Table 2. Blueprint for the new concept of speed dating event

		
Register online + order 3 course meal	They select 3 dates (one for each course) based on their menu selection – A list of 3 dates (based on match) will be sent to participants before the event.	Pre-event stage
1	2	
		Event stage
At the end of each course, women remain seated, and men move to next date	During (or after) the event, participants grade each other	
3	4	
		Post-event stage
Based on the grading of participants, they are matched. Results are communicated to them via the app	If there is a match, participants can exchange their details	
5	6	

Source: The authors

On top of customer satisfaction, this advertainment and edutainment approach, by putting food at the intersection of the dating industry and hospitality industry is reconciling both industries as each can reap benefits from this new concept, which will also enable and facilitate ‘control’ by each party involved. This study therefore presented food as a soft management tool to facilitate relationships between partners within a non-service ecosystem. The role and importance of food in relationships, whether business (Ramsey, 2004), or political, is also discussed by Lu a and Jake evi  (2015) in their research on the importance and role of food in International Relations (IR), and particularly in diplomacy. In that line of thought, Lu a and Jake evi  (2015) have used the terms ‘gastro diplomacy’, ‘food diplomacy’ or ‘culinary diplomacy’ to emphasise on the importance of food in IR.

5 RESEARCH AGENDA AND CONCLUSION

5.1. Summary

Speed dating events which are playful moments for adults (S raphin, 2023) are based on a model of convivial atmosphere where friendliness, playfulness, liveliness, social interactions, togetherness, fun activities, etc are central. (Rokka et al, 2023). The success of these events depends on the willingness of participants to fully immersed themselves into the context (Luo and Zhang, 2009).

5.2. Research Agenda

In the realm of future research, there are several areas worth exploring in order to gain a better understanding of the 'Dinner Date' concept and its potential implications. These areas are listed based on their importance and feasibility.

- Impact on customer satisfaction: It would be valuable to assess the influence of the 'Dinner Date' concept on customer satisfaction. This can be achieved by analysing feedback from customers who have experienced this concept, measuring metrics such as the number of bookings, and conducting surveys or interviews to gather mixed data.
- Contribution to restaurant and bar incomes and competitive advantage: Investigating the financial implications of implementing the 'Dinner Date' concept could provide useful insights for businesses in the hospitality industry.
- Addressing standard, delivery, and perception gaps: It would be worthwhile to explore how the 'Dinner Date' concept closes gaps that may exist in standard practices, delivery mechanisms, and customer perceptions. In this case, researchers can further evaluate the potential of the concept to bridge any deficiencies in current dining experiences.

5.3. Conclusion

The primary objective of this research paper is to present significant discoveries that provide insight into the marketing dynamics between organizations operating in the dating services and hospitality sectors. The study's outcomes emphasize the importance of establishing clear definitions for the marketing relationship in these industries.

Moreover, the research findings propose the adoption of more effective partner ecosystem strategies, aiming to enhance the overall value provided to consumers through mutually advantageous objectives and collaborative initiatives. It highlights the significance of achieving alignment among partners within their respective ecosystems, thereby identifying existing gaps and suggesting specific conditions and activities to bridge these gaps.

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